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A mournful Easter. A discourse

Rev. Charles H. Hall.

Washington, 1865.

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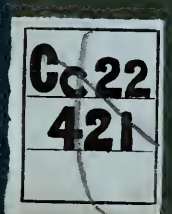

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for the founding of a College in this Colony"

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A MOURNFUL EASTER.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY,

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

On EASTER DAY, APRIL 19, 1865,

BY THE RECTOR, REV. CHARLES H. HALL, D. D.

BEING THE SECOND DAY AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AND A SIMILAR ATTEMPT UPON THE SECRETARY OF STATE, ON THE NIGHT OF GOOD FRIDAY.

WASHINGTON:
GIDEON & PEARSON, PRINTERS.
1865.

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CORRESPONDENCE

359 H Street,

Washington City, *April* 17, 1865.

Rev. Charles H. Hall, D. D.

Dear Sir:—At a meeting of the Congregation of Epiphany Church, this evening, the undersigned were appointed a committee to express to you the gratification with which they listened to the sermon which you delivered on Easter morning, and to request a copy thereof for publication.

We, therefore, respectfully request that you furnish us a copy at your earliest convenience.

Very truly,

CHARLES KNAP,
St. JOHN B. L. SKINNER,
THOS. R. WILSON.

Washington, Epiphany Rectory, *April* 19, 1865.

To Messrs. Charles Knap, St. John B. L. Skinner, Thos. R. Wilson.

Gentlemen:—The wish of the Congregation of Epiphany Church in a matter of this kind is, of course, law with us; and I herewith send you the manuscript of the Sermon of Easter Sunday morning. It is a simple word of feeling from all our hearts, and may possibly be interesting and useful to others. We who have known the private history of the distinguished subject of the Discourse as a neighbor, as well as his official actions as the Chief Magistrate of the nation, I doubt not all, without exception, will feel disposed with me to complete the passage of the poet to which I have alluded:

> "Besides this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking off."

As my own small tribute to his memory, who has given me reasons of my own for lamenting him, I commit the Discourse to you and the Congregation of the Epiphany, with assurances of my esteem.

CH. H. HALL, *Rector.*

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These Prayers for the Country were used between the Morning Prayer and the Order of the Holy Communion.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite; Have mercy upon the whole Church and Country; and so rule the hearts of those who are in chief power and authority in this Nation, that they, knowing Whose ministers they are, may above all things seek Thy honor and glory; and that we, and all those who are subject to their administration of the Constitution and Laws by which they and we are governed, duly considering Whose authority they bear, may faithfully serve, honor, and humbly obey the law of the land by them administered and executed, in Thee and for Thee, according to Thy blessed Word and Ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth ever, world without end. *Amen.*

Most Gracious God, we humbly beseech Thee, as for the people of these United States in general, so especially for all those who in Council are now called on to assist in restoring to peaceful and orderly course the affairs of this whole Nation; that Thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, and to guide and further their proceedings, to the advancement of Thy glory, the good of Thy Church, the safety, honor, and welfare of Thy people; that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavors, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety may be established among us for all

generations. These and all other necessaries, for them, for us, and Thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the Name and mediation of JESUS CHRIST, our most blessed LORD and Saviour. *Amen.*

O merciful GOD and heavenly Father, who hast taught us in Thy Word that Thou dost not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men; we humbly beseech Thee of Thy goodness to comfort and succor all those who are at this time suffering in the miserable calamities brought upon this Nation and City by violence and civil war. Mercifully vouchsafe supplies of spiritual strength and consolation to the wounded, sick, and dying, and raise up friends for them in their need. Be a Father to the fatherless and a Husband to the widow. Furnish shelter to the homeless, sustenance to the impoverished, support to the bereaved and destitute. Lighten the bonds of those who are captives or in prison. Give all, in their several visitations, a right understanding of themselves and of Thy threats and promises, that they may neither cast away their confidence in Thee, nor place it anywhere but in Thee. Relieve the distressed, protect the innocent, and awaken the guilty; and forasmuch as Thou alone bringest light out of darkness, and good out of evil, make the manifold forms of human suffering now darkening our land effectual for the conversion of many souls to Thee, that among us fruits meet for repentance may be abundantly brought forth, and that the glory of thy grace may be made known among all nations, now and forevermore; through JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. *Amen.*

DISCOURSE.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life."—*St. John* xi. 25.

The words of the Burial service are the appropriate words of this troubled Easter morning. We had prepared to leave behind us the gloomier thoughts of the tomb, and decking it, as it were, with flowers and palm branches, to gaze with serene eye steadfastly on the glorious morning of the Resurrection; to forget for a while the instinctive repugnance of the human heart at the short interval of the grave; to look beyond it to the abodes of our expected reward, where tears shall be wiped from all eyes, and the disquieting fears which beset us here in the world of chances and changes would give way to eternal repose and joy. But we are called in the providence of God to look more at the sorrows than the joys that surround the Christian's hope; to weep with those who weep rather than dwell upon the topics of our exulting hope. On the night of that first Good Friday, the narrow tomb of the rich man of Arimathea, which he had hewn out in his little rocky garden spot, wherein he hoped himself, after a quiet departure from the troubles of earth, to sleep with his fathers, held the hastily buried remains of his Master. Violence and crime had done their work, and the One who came to bless our race had been slain by wicked hands; and a few trembling disciples, shocked by the overthrow of all their hopes, outraged by the horrible passions of their unbelieving countrymen, were hiding in retired places, and telling with scared faces, That this

was He Who, we had thought, would bring salvation unto Israel. Words would fail to picture their grief and horror. Perhaps nothing could communicate the sense of it to our hearts more effectually than the feelings which now weigh heavy upon all our hearts in common, as we mourn together in our national bereavement. There can, of course, be no proper comparison made between any mortal man and the Son of God. We need not be suspected of making it, after joining, as we have done, in the words of the ancient Creed, that Jesus Christ was "God of God—of the same substance with the Father." But He became a man and was found in the form of a servant, and stooped to the death of the Cross, with all its indignities and cruelties, that we might always draw together under the shadow of that Cross, and feel in Him our mutual sympathy in all sudden calamities, and draw from His religion the strength to do our common duties; the hope to sustain us under our common griefs. We gather now around an open grave, permitted to be opened on this Easter Day by the awful and wicked tragedy of this last Good Friday, to temper our pious gratulations as believers with the sorrow which has befallen us as citizens. The grave and gate of death opens before us as a people, and we mourn the sanguinary crimes which have made our Good Friday so marked an event in the history of the world. It becomes us to mingle the Easter-chant, with the minor wail of the *Miserere*, and to pray God not to forsake us, nor let the ungodly get the upper hand. We are an afflicted nation, horrified by the darkest crimes which can befall a people. Yet, even here, let us pass beyond the things which are seen; and our common faith at once opens to us its own lessons of trust in Him who is the Resur-

rection and the Life, who ever liveth to make intercession for us. The frightfulness of the times may make the blood well nigh stop at the core of the heart; the success of crime appalls the reason of the bravest. That one horror, which had thus far been spared us, now to fall so suddenly, so unresisted, causes the mind to pass back in gloomy retrospect, to recall the like events in the past, and the miserable accompaniments that attended them. We are paralyzed. That our people—so free to debate their perplexities, so fair and manly in the almost unlicensed discussion of them, so patient in waiting for their normal solution—should be thus defeated of their hopes and robbed of their rejoicing in the very moment when we were all taking breath after the trials of the past struggle; when we were hoping that God's great boon of love and reconciliation was about to glide down upon bleeding hearts in all this land—it is the most tremendous blow, the most fearful calamity that has ever befallen us. We can only stand appalled. We can only gather in our homes, where tears and sighs have attested our instinctive sympathy with the afflicted, and bow before the Supreme Ruler of all events, and cry to Him, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach." We may wisely strive to gather such comfort as we may, by our faith, from the assured hopes of the Christian covenant.

Christ is the Resurrection and the Life—not merely promises it, not only has sought out the causes of it, but Himself *is it*. He died that He might go down into the dark hopeless chambers of the grave, and there prepare a way for us—there get the victory over death—and rising again from the grave ascend on high, leading captivity

captive, and give us men the pledge of a like resurrection. He gave us the profound assurance that He rules over us in all the ages; that He guides for us the world and all its changes; that there can nothing die which is His truth; that even if individuals pass away the Truth, guided by Him, lives and moves on, and will have its due success by His care. This resurection of Christ gave us not alone the pledge of individual resuscitation from the grave. Great as that advantage is to each individual; as pure and blessed a revelation as that personal hope is to each soul which goes down to the grave; the other lesson is as grand and replete with comfort. The apostles, each proclaimed his single belief in his own resurrection, cheered his disciples in all the Churches with the exulting arguments which told that as in "Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive;" yielded each his spirit in peace, like St. Stephen, as seeing the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

But there is another lesson in it, which they and all Christians have received deep into their consciousness—the fact that in Christ, the great law of Truth and Love, which underlies all our civilization, can never die. I do not fancy an Apostle of Jesus, as he felt his life slipping away in agony; as he looked around on faces of enemies, taunting him with every epithet of shameful abuse, and glaring upon him with the scowlings of brutal rage, comforting himself with the individual consolation: "I shall rise again; I shall turn to the dust, but that dust of mine shall be watched by angels, and at the resurrection recalled and changed into a glorious and spiritual body." No; this may have formed their subject of rejoicing, as they sang psalms and hymns in hours of respite. This became

their grand argument as they combatted unbelief or rebuked sin. This was the theme of their discourse as they bent over the parchment on which with the stylus they wrote the words of quiet and serenest comfort to the Christians, who were not yet "resisting unto blood," but only bearing up under ordinary trials. But when the hour of their own final trial came, they doubtless (as I conceive of them) were wrought up to a grander theme: that in Christ, the Truth could never die. Even pagans had taught them the great fact, that it was easy to die for one's country, when the faith in their country was strong in them. Even old Norsemen have set before us the image of this great consolation; and their scalds represent their heroes when overcome in battles, chanting the songs of their national glory; that while they as individuals fly away to the halls of Valhalla, the life of the people ever lives on. And those loving hearts, which had endured and dared all things for others—who, moved by Divine pity had learned to forget self in charity to the miserable of all countries—when their hour of martyrdom came at last, laid down their lives in sublime trust, that while they as individuals perished, the Church could never perish. They felt themselves to be but particles running in the veins and arteries of the Spiritual Body. That Body would live on, though they passed out of sight. "The gates of death" could never prevail against it. It had risen in Christ and would live even by their sorrows; would gain new strength from their defeat, would yet crown their names with testimonials of gratitude for the blessings purchased by their "faithfulness unto death." It is that profound faith in the spiritual oversight of Christ over us, in our Christian civilization, which has

made the deaths of individuals tolerable—which gives us a solemn strength in the midst of the most agitating doubts and the gloomiest disasters. Martyrs in all ages have taught us the meaning of that quaint merriment of the noble old bishop at Oxford, as he said: "We shall light this day a candle which shall give light to all England."

When in old Rome, Cæsar fell before the daggers of assassins, there was a gloom which hung like a pall over the whole land, unrelieved by one certain, assured hope of the future; but to-day, much as we have quaked in horror at the atrocious crimes which have defiled the land with the blood of unresisting victims, we unconsciously rest assured of our Future. There may yet be circles of trouble and fear, but the stream will again run smooth, and the Country, after its scourging has passed and its wild passions are quieted, will once more pass on to its high place in the catalogue of the nations. We have this faith deeper fixed than we think it, till some severe trial brings it to the surface. We may call it up as the true lesson to us of this great Christian festival. And if any one has made the wretched mistake of doubting this deep faith in this nation, or supposing that our life has hung entirely on any single individual, he has only by a dastardly cowardice given us the opportunity of showing the vital force of the institutions which we have received from our forefathers. Let us in that sublime conviction lean back on our trust in God and "dwell in the land and be doing good." Let us join to remember that vengeance belongeth to the Lord, and administer justice upon the guilty, unruffled by the passions or the fears of the first shock of alarm. Our country will enshrine the fallen in

her inmost heart, will forget their errors, if they had them, will pardon their faults, such as they were, and give them a glorious record of her love and gratitude, such as they might have missed by a gentler exit. I do not make them out to be martyrs to Religion, but to their Country. They have died in the midst of a community, that has thrilled with horror at the utter wantonness of the deed; its mere stupid, brutal, theatrical revenge. No cause of all those for which men are struggling can be supposed by the most fanatical imagination to be advantaged by this deed. If it has been plotted to defeat our national life and to hurry us into anarchy, it will take but one calm hour of reflection to show the madness of such a hope. We are not the Christian people I wish and pray we may be; we are in many things too careless and profane; we have too often forgotten God, and neglected too many of the duties that we owe Him; but there is yet a deep consciousness under all these visible faults of character, which will suffice to carry us through these dangers. We can call up our faith in the Truth, the Christian charity for all men, the deep innate struggle in us as a nation for the Rights of man, and believe that individuals may perish, policies may rise and fall, great mistakes may be made and repented of; but the normal life of the Nation will increase in vigor, and prompt to new and better epochs. Trusting to this, let us be calm. Let us be brave, and consider our own sins and beg God to watch over us and mercifully pardon us the past.

I conclude with a word or two concerning the distinguished individual, who has been struck down by a dastardly, cowardly crime. How fair was that Good Friday! The sun came up with purest, whitest light; the buoyant

air was full of Spring, and the calm hours glided away—the truest, best picture possible of peace. How many hearts were exulting that Peace and Spring seemed coming in together; that magnanimity was becoming the theme of common consideration; that as the quiet after a thunder-storm, so the social scenery would witness the pause and tears of reconciliation and renewed brotherhood. I had received a letter from the distant Diocesan of Maine, (a man loyal to the core,) occupied with delicate scruples concerning our returning brethren of the Church. And for such a day to pass into such night—the heart is paralyzed by it!

But for the immortal soul, which was called so suddenly to meet the award of death, has there been one day in all the past four years of his administration that would have such an idea of Divine mercy mingled with it for him, when we think of him as immortal, and as having passed the change which meets us all? He is believed by all men, by his political enemies as well as his intimates, to have been a kind man—one easy to be entreated. In mercy he was simple and sincere. He had long since given orders that no one on a mission to him of life and death should ever be refused an audience. I have heard those who differed from him in political life declare him to be beyond question a merciful man. At one recital of grief I know, he broke down, and mingled his tears with those of the suppliant. I can testify from personal knowledge to his quaint but honest mercifulness of disposition; willing to spare suffering to a tale of woe, and then struggling to conceal, under a blunt exterior the tenderness of his own almost womanly sympathy. But on last Good Friday, of all the days of his adminis-

tration, he was probably most bent on thoughts of mercy. The benign influence of it had permeated the time. We all felt a new hope rising up in us. Something of the old look had come on the faces of men and women, as we talked together of the future. The images of a book of an Irish Lord* came stealing into my own mind all the day—as he caresses the figure-head of his little vessel, in which he had been tossed in the storms and beset by the fogs and icebergs of the Spitzbergen seas, as she rises proudly in the clear water, and leaving her dangers behind, begins to fling the snowy foam from her bows, on her passage home; and he sings how the waves

> —— "cowered, and ranged themselves on either side,
> Like vassal ranks who watch some passing queen
> Through her white-columned halls in silence glide,
> Nor mingling meet till she no more is seen."

So came to me the hope of our Country, which was stealing into all hearts; of our progress out of night and perils to a brighter and better day.

The Draft was suspended. What anxious multitudes of mothers and wives thanked God for that message! The materials of destruction were not to be increased. Swords would give way for peaceful implements of agriculture! And thus I imagined him, led by the Father of him and us alike—mysteriously led—to thoughts of forgiveness and conciliation and mercy to all—led possibly unconsciously to imitating Him, Whose blessed words had moulded the civilization by which he was held, as He said, on that other Good Friday, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—and thus made ready to go, by ways and means beyond our finding out.

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*Lord Dufferin. *Yacht Voyages, Letters from high Latitudes.*

Brethren, I would that he had been a church-member, in all the proprieties of our appointed modes of thought. But I wish also the same of very many of you, whom I shall be too weak, when the time comes, to give up, with Admah and Zeboim, if you do not conform as I would have you. But there is a perverse education in our land, which moulds us all to some unhappy errors of life and thought; and the matter is a sore perplexity. But failing this appointed relation, which our disputes and sects so misrepresent and confuse in the public mind as to leave a divided painful responsibility, I ask you: Could he have gone up to meet his Judge with a more merciful spirit than we suppose him to have had? He has always declared himself a believer in the Christian religion.* He has, beyond question, believed himself to be an appointed apostle of the Rights of man, as he conceived them. And then, with his heart full of the one grand principle of reconciliation and peace, I can leave him to the mercy of Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life, and to Whom we too shall need to appeal for mercy, rather than justice. The very central element of all Christian ethics rests on these words: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who

* The following words of farewell to his neighbors, on leaving them, Feb. 11, 1861, have now a fresh and mournful interest:

My Friends: No one not in my position can appreciate the sadness I feel at this parting. To this people I owe all that I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century; here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried. I know not how soon I shall see you again. A duty devolves upon me, which is, perhaps, greater than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded except for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he at all times relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine aid which sustained him, and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support; and I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain. Again I bid you all an affectionate farewell.

trespass against us." The one side of it he was striving to do fully and nobly. The other side is with his God, who searches and judges the heart. We lament his loss, with detestation at the crime; "the deep damnation of his taking off." May God give comfort to the afflicted families, whose losses will make Good Friday memorable in our national records. May He give repentance to the wretched criminals who have stained their hands, wantonly and stupidly in innocent blood, before they are called upon to meet the just punishment of their attrocities. May He give us grace to understand the seriousness and solemnity of our duties to the government over us; and as He only can, *bring good out of this evil.*